

Heber residents prepare for June powwow

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Heber Correspondent

Several thousand Indians are expected to arrive in Heber for the first Heber City Powwow, June 2-5.

The total population of the town is only about 4,300. To prepare the people in the community for the impact, Indians are explaining the strict powwow etiquette and Indian culture at three mini powwows.

One of the purposes of the "introduction to the Heber Valley" series, is to dispel prejudices harbored by many non-Indians. Those who attended the first one realized early in the evening that, while the cultures are significantly different, they also are very much alike.

Anyone who expected a "wild Indian" show must have been surprised when it turned out to be, instead, an

educational, cultural and spiritual evening. The fears of anyone who might have feared the powwow would bring "a bunch of drunken Indians" learned that liquor in any form is banned from a powwow and if an Indian consumes liquor he loses the privilege of wearing eagle feathers.

But the intent of those presenting the program was to help local people get to know them, not to emphasize differences. They already live and work in a non-Indian society. Their message was clear: "We want you to get to know us, too, so we can be friends."

The presentation began with an Indian prayer to Creator, first offering thanks for all his creations, then requesting his blessings, particularly on the program.

Indian dancers and drum groups

travel on circuits, competing for prizes. Each competitor is accompanied by an entourage of as many as 100 supporters. They set up camps and construct arenas at the host cities. A medicine man blesses the construction as it progresses. Booths are built for selling food, arts and crafts.

The prayer was followed by the grand entry, when all the powwow participants danced into the arena, one at a time, while the audience stood. The oldest men and leaders lead the procession, followed by younger men, women, then children.

The emcee was Nola Lodge, an Oneida Indian, who teaches Native American Studies at the University of Utah. She explained that in a full-scale powwow 200 to 300 people may take an hour or two to fill the arena, a spectacular sight.

Throughout the evening she instructed non-Indians on powwow protocol, emphasizing that a powwow is a sacred event. There is always an emcee who tells the audience what to expect and explain what is happening in the arena. The arena director manages the events in the arena and enforces the protocol, ousting a disrespectful spectator, if necessary.

Dancers and drum groups compete in categories according to age and type of dancing. Traditional dancing is conservative in tempo, movements and costume. Fancy dancing, developed during the past 80 years, has faster, more intricate footwork and the costumes are more spectacular. There are also inter-tribal dances and some dances which non-Indians may join.

The emcee announces when to stand, as during men's traditional dancing, and when to refrain from taking pictures. According to etiquette, photographers should get permission to take individual pictures.

Both men and women design and make their own costumes. Every color and ornament has personal meaning. One man said he wasn't wearing full regalia because some of the symbols were so personal and sacred that he only wears them to actual powwows and didn't feel he could share them that night.

We learned that the eagle symbolizes nearness to Creator and that eagle feathers are bestowed as honors, usually on returning warriors. Today, those who are United States veterans receive eagle feathers. The feathers are religious symbols used in prayer, to comfort, and bring healing, similar to anointed oil in some religions. An Indian must respect his eagle feather and will lose it if he dishonors it.



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